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NEW JERSEY COLLEGES:

HIGHER LEARNING AMONG the PINES

Lakewood Campus of Georgian Court College Was Once the Palatial Estate of a Multi-Millionaire Who Patterned Gardens After Those of Versailles

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM



Grouped on marble and "gold" staircase for song rehearsal is the Georgian Court College Glee Club.

Location is typical of mansion's fabulous interior and appointments, which are an art lover's dream.

TRY to see Georgian Court College in Lakewood through the eyes of a high school girl, down to talk to college officials and to decide whether Georgian Court is the place to matriculate. After the initial interview Sister Incarnata, the registrar, asks hospitably, "Would you like to see the grounds?"

Perhaps the young visitor knows something about Georgian Court College already—that it occupies the former estate of turn-of-the-century gay spender George Jay Gould, that its grounds are said to be lovely. Probably, however, like the average applicant she knows nothing of the estate when she smiles back and says, "Why, yes, I would."

The registrar leads the way, just as she has on so many occasions, through the fabulous Gould mansion with its priceless art treasures, its golden staircase and its rich quietude. She leads the way across campus through the maze of the formal gardens copied from Versailles. She shows the indoor squash courts, the bowling alleys, the gymnasium-auditorium in which there is said to be more floor space than in Madison Square Garden.

No reaction would surprise the Sister after many such guided tours, whether it be eye-popping or mere open-mouthed gasping. Well, perhaps two reactions would surprise her, at that—boredom or indifference. To be either bored or indifferent in the midst of the wonders of Georgian Court is to be beyond feeling.

THE splendor of Georgian Court is a mixed blessing. Sometimes Mother Marie Anna, president of the college, wonders if some potential students aren't frightened away by the thought that fees at Georgian Court College

This is the tenth of a series of articles which not only describe New Jersey's colleges and universities, but tell the story of the growth and traditions of individual colleges within the state, picture their roles in modern education and explain how they plan to meet what has been called "an impending tide of students."

Next Sunday: Newark Colleges of Rutgers University.



are exorbitant. "I suppose," she reflects, "the estate might make people think we are a school for the wealthy."

That isn't true. Georgian Court is a highly-respected liberal arts college, where tuition is only \$500 a year and total annual expenses range between \$1,300 and \$1,400—less than many colleges and about equal to the average New Jersey cost. The student body represents the same cross-section of social classes as is found in most American colleges—and about one-third of all students earn part or all of their way.

Still, no visitor can be blamed if on first exposure to Georgian Court College he stands in awe of the almost indescribable luxuriousness of this campus in the South Jersey pines. It isn't that Georgian Court was built in multi-millionaire style that inspires the awe; instead it's because the 200 students who attend Georgian Court get so much in the way of material surroundings.

College and estate have been one since 1924, when the Sisters of Mercy bought the property from the Gould estate. The sisters acquired more than 200 acres and several handsome buildings. They also inherited to a degree the saga of George Jay Gould's efforts to keep up with his times, when millionaires vied with one another to make sure no dollar remained unspent.

GEORGE GOULD, son of the shrewd and, sometimes unscrupulous railroad magnate Jay Gould, started to build Georgian Court in 1896. That was 10 years after he married a lovely young actress named Edith Kingdon, who had made her stage debut in Newark's old Park Theater. The Goulds believed Lakewood would be an ideal spot in which to rear their two sons and four daughters.

Gould told noted architect Bruce Price: "Don't exceed the limits of good taste." Price built the great mansion of gray brick and stucco, combining for the first time an English Georgian house with a high-pitched French Renaissance roof.

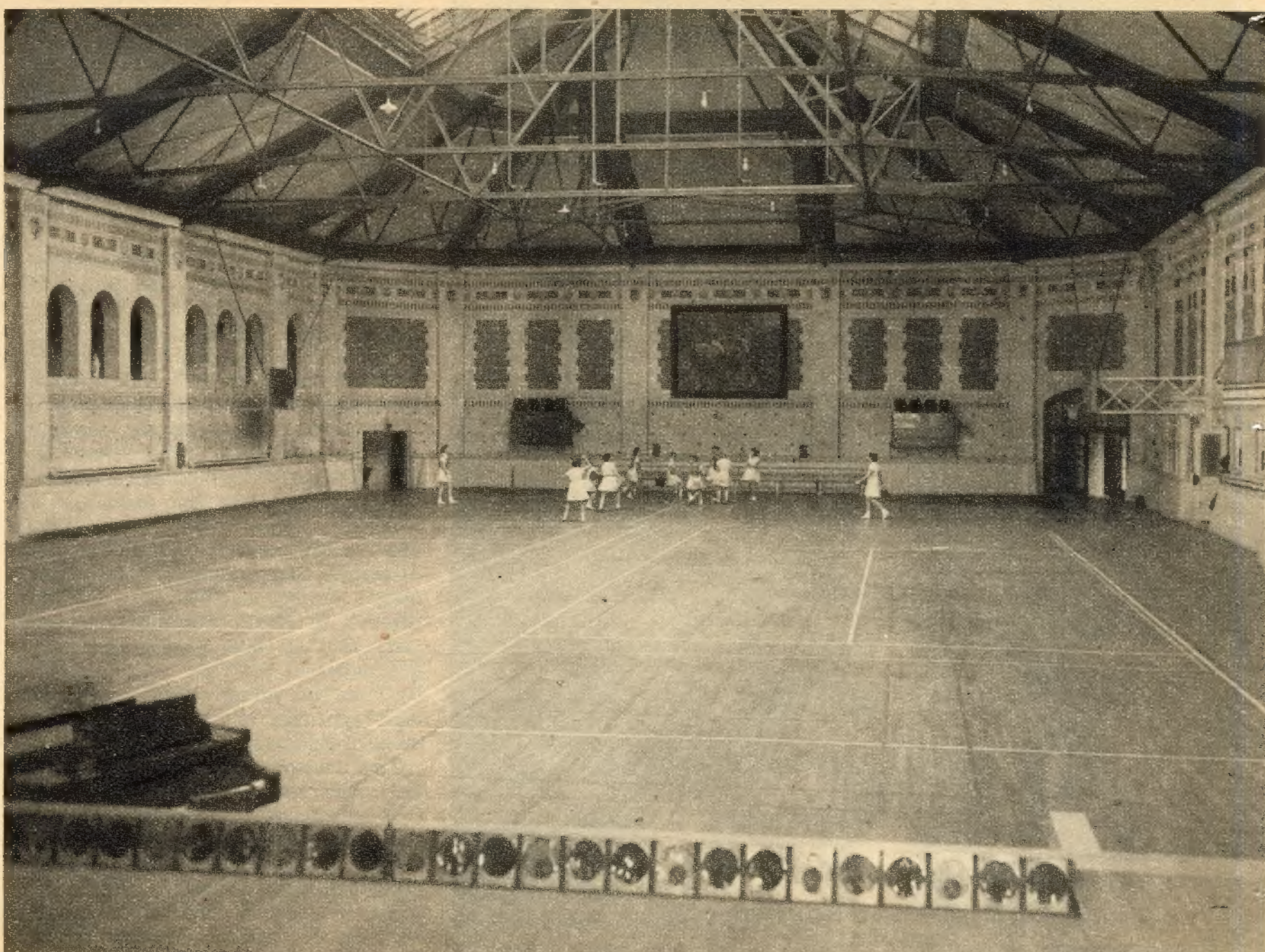
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ABOVE: In paneled quarters of mansion, which serves as senior dormitory and administration building, are Ofelia Limcaoco (left) of Philippines and Mary Conrad, Fort Monmouth. Room is part of old Gould study.

BELOW: The Casino, a combination gymnasium-auditorium said to have more floor space than Madison Square Garden. "Roman" balcony and life-sized painting of Gould's sons on ponies overlook the basketball court.



At Georgian Court the Sisters of Mercy conduct an institution that is respected by educators for its liberal arts program. Here Sister Stephanie, physics instructor, holds gravity demonstration for Barbara Hand (left), Point Pleasant, and Doris Burke, Pleasantville.



GEORGIAN COURT COLLEGE



The fountain of Apollo, a bronze and marble statuary, was a birthday gift from millionaire George Jay Gould to his actress-wife.



Campus with a view. Senior path leads to the Casino in background and (below) the fountain in sunken garden reached by twin terraces.



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Later Price declared: "It is not a gorgeous house, not sumptuous in the ordinary sense of the word." Architect Price must have been a man used to nice things, indeed.

How much money Gould spent, or Price spent for him, no one knows for certain. Perhaps six million dollars, perhaps eight million dollars, perhaps more. The mansion cost at least 1½ million dollars and the landscaping cost a minimum of one million dollars. Interestingly enough, since he believed in "making a house fit the grounds," when Price landscaped the grounds he changed them completely to give them the appearance of a British-Roman-French estate (some of all three).

Gould built a tremendous stable for his 44 horses and his 90 polo ponies. On impulse, the story goes, he ordered the building of the "Court" or "Casino" on the hill after some weekend guests found themselves bored by an unrelenting rain. The "Court" contained a great hall for exercising polo ponies, squash courts, a 45-foot swimming pool and rooms for guests. Never let it be said anyone went away from Georgian Court bored.

The passing years brought sadness. The Goulds had marital difficulties. Mrs. Gould collapsed suddenly and died under a huge oak tree while playing golf on the course before the "Court." George Jay Gould forgot his estate in the pines long before his death in 1923.

THIS is the estate heritage the Sisters of Mercy bought in 1924 along with the grounds and buildings. The Gould heirs asked \$800,000 for Georgian Court and the Sisters paid about one half of the asking price. Certainly the sumptuousness of the Gould estate didn't overawe the Sisters; they know well the temporal nature of such worldly things. They bought the estate because it seemed ideal for a college campus—and the years have proved how right they were.

Besides, the Sisters of Mercy had a heritage of their own, and they had bought Georgian Court with that heritage in mind. The New Jersey mother house of the Sisters had been founded in Bordentown in 1873 and through the years the order had developed a high educational reputation, sending teachers to Catholic parish schools in the Dioceses of Trenton and Camden.

The Sisters saw the need for a woman's college in the Trenton Diocese, so with characteristically simple directness they organized Mount Saint Mary's College in 1908 on a hillside campus in North Plainfield. Seven girls, four of them Sisters of Mercy, graduated in the first class in 1912. By then the young college had been fully approved by the State Department of Education.

Fire destroyed the little college in 1911; the Sisters rebuilt before the first graduation. Growing demands after World War I gave Mount Saint Mary's College pause. They had to expand or move elsewhere. Providentially, it seemed, the Gould estate went on the market. Equally providentially, although many wealthy peo-

ple showed interest (including Mary Pickford), none wrote out a check. The Sisters thus could buy at a price they could afford.

MOTHER Mary Cecelia and Mother Mary John led the small college with its 100 students from North Plainfield to Lakewood. At the suggestion of Most Rev. Thomas J. Walsh, then Bishop of Trenton, they decided to take the estate's name for the college. The names of Mother Mary Cecelia and Mother Mary John are synonymous in the minds of most alumnae of the 1924-1948 era. These two built the strong liberal arts traditions and they made the decision to preserve the estate as much as possible in its original condition. Alterations to the mansion, for example, were kept at a minimum and today it serves as an administration building and as a dormitory for senior students.

The roomy and elaborate Gould stable became Raymond Hall, with offices and classrooms in the west wing and the dining hall in the east wing. Two annexes were built in the rear of Raymond Hall, one for science laboratories and the other for home economics classrooms. Later, when the Lakewood parish built a new church, the college bought the town's little wooden chapel and brought it to the campus to fill in a quadrangle formed by the old stable, the two annexes and the chapel.

Converting a mansion into a dormitory or even a stable into an administrative and classroom building could pose problems but nothing in comparison with the tremendous "Court" on the hill. The Sisters covered the dirt polo pony exercise floor with a board floor and used up one end with a stage on which 200 can maneuver readily.

No one calls Gould's "Court" by that name anymore. Now it's the "Casino," but by whatever name it's stupendous. A full-sized basketball court occupies one small corner, beneath Roman-like balconies and a life-sized painting of Gould's sons, George and Jay, mounted on polo ponies. The floor can seat 3,000 easily. Sometimes, as when Georgian Court Graduate Jessica Dragonette has sung at the spring music festival, 4,000 or more persons have crowded into the Casino.

Elsewhere in the Casino there are three bowling alleys, two squash courts, a swimming pool surrounded by a brass rail and one of the half dozen or so court tennis (or Royal tennis) courts in America. The Georgian Court girl exercises in elegance; she has more than ample facilities for physical education and competitive sports.

EXPANSION has taken Georgian Court out from behind the estate's high iron fence supported by marble pillars but not far away—whether measured by distance or by the less tangible material splendor. Purchases from 1929 to 1944 added four nearby mansions, including the one-time homes of Arthur Brisbane and Madame deCuevis, daughter of John D. Rockefeller.

All these handsome possessions keep drawing the mind away from the



Chapel (left) and "Kings Cote," the latter a former home of Arthur Brisbane remodeled into a dormitory, were early acquisitions of the



college. Beside campus gate is Mother Marie Anna, president since 1948, who was closely connected with Georgian Court since founding.

fact that in Georgian Court College the Sisters of Mercy conduct an institution whose liberal arts program is respected by educators and is fully accredited. This is important to stress, even more than at most colleges; it can so easily be forgotten in the imposing environment.

Each year Georgian Court graduates some 50 young women, nearly half of whom are prepared to teach in elementary or secondary schools. Another 17 per cent go on to graduate schools in such diverse fields as law, medicine, education, merchandising and sciences. About 3 per cent become homemakers immediately after graduation (although nearly all graduates eventually become wives and mothers). Another 3 per cent enter the Sisterhood.

The essential point is that a Georgian Court education prepares a young woman for a wide career range—teaching, scientific pursuits, personnel work, home economics, business, music, art and so on.

LIBERAL arts preparation is the heart of the matter. Mother Marie Anna, president since 1948 and intimately connected with the college since its founding, knows those traditions well. She cites the program planned to lead a student through a variety of academic experience—science, arts, languages and other areas.

Yet, basic in the success of Georgian Court is the faculty, the president emphasizes. "There is nothing provincial about our faculty," she says directly—and underscores the statement by listing some of the university centers where staff members have won degrees. Even a partial list is impressive: Harvard, Oxford, Budapest, Notre Dame, Catholic University, Cornell, Pennsylvania, the Sorbonne, Fordham and University College of London.

Georgian Court's academic emphasis dictates exacting admissions standards. Lack of adequate secondary school preparation or mental capacity—not the lack of money—can keep a

girl off the Lakewood campus. Actually, Mother Marie Anna points out, generous scholarship endowments enable a girl in need of financial assistance to attend Georgian Court if she has the academic ability and other qualifications.

All the students who work in the dining hall, by way of illustration, are rewarded with full scholarships—tuition, room and board, everything. "Our working students are often our leaders," Mother Marie Anna says with pride. "Several of our student council presidents have worked in the dining hall. There is no stigma."

IN preserving the liberal arts tradition, Georgian Court requires every student to take 16 credits in philosophy, 12 credits each in modern languages, English and social sciences, and six credits in a basic or general science. Catholic students also are required to take 16 credits in Theology (optional for non-Catholic women).

That leaves no time for falling behind academically. Study in a major field can begin as early as the freshman year, usually is started in sophomore and junior years and culminates with a required senior thesis. Scholastically, therefore, Georgian Court is no place for procrastination. The new Farley Memorial Library, built in 1951 with a capacity of 60,000 volumes, gets the full use for which it was intended.

However, too much emphasis cannot be placed on the cultural and artistic value of the Gould estate surroundings. Take, for instance, the dormitory rooms. When Mother Marie Anna calls them "homey," she minimizes their unusual quality. These are rooms where Goulds and Brisbanes and Rockefellers lived; they are huge and well appointed and splendid. No wonder every girl who possibly can live on campus (only about 15 out of 200 students are commuters).

Everywhere there is magnificence. The interior of the mansion is an art lover's dream. Priceless paintings adorn the walls. Still, while the mansion cost millions, it has none of the

garishness of so many mansions of the period. Architect Price knew how to spend money; he also knew how to spend it in fine taste.

THEN there are the grounds. Call them anything—breath-taking, incomparable, awe-inspiring, magnificent. Any adjective is correct, again excepting any adjective indicating poor taste. A lagoon leads in from Lake Carasaljo, then the beauty unfolds in the walk upward. Twin terraces lead upward to the sunken gardens featuring a handsome fountain. Up terraces again, the promenader reaches the esplanade.

Off to the east are the mansion and stable, separated by fine formal gardens. Slightly to the west is the bronze and marble statue of Apollo and his horses straining as if to make the mythological climb to the sun come true. They strain to the north, in the direction of the Casino on the hill beneath tall pines and towering oaks.

Between Apollo and the Casino are the Italian gardens, copied from those of Versailles (and, in the opinion of some who know, finer even than the original). Roads lead around the east and west sides of the garden and in the middle is Senior Path, where only seniors may promenade. Halfway to the Casino on Senior Path is the great statue of the eagle (good) overcoming the dragon (evil), bought for \$20,000 by Gould from the Japanese exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition.

NATURE heightens all of this man-imposed excellence. Springtime touches the scores of lilac shrubs with ranges of color between white and deep purple, paints the dogwood trees pink and white. Fall brings rich color to the oak trees on the hill and October breezes send red leaves whispering across the campus. Even in winter, when snow sifts silently through the pines, Georgian Court has the beauty to bring joy to any heart or mind.

Mother Marie Anna and all other

members of Georgian Court's faculty (about half of whom are lay teachers) are proud of their surroundings. There is no reason why they shouldn't be; they and those who have gone before have preserved the estate until today it is a virtual museum of a by-gone era as well as a top-flight women's college.

A former estate isn't easy to maintain. Georgian Court is debt-free, thanks to the low initial cost of the estate and thanks to the fact that half the faculty is composed of nuns who teach without tutorial recompense. Freed in some measure of faculty costs, the college is troubled most by maintenance of the grounds—costing more than \$100,000 annually.

Mother Marie Anna expects Georgian Court's residential enrollment to increase to nearly 300 women within 10 or 15 years. Two hundred more commuting students may be expected if the Garden State Parkway brings the residential growth predicted for Ocean County. That means that by 1970 Georgian Court's enrollment could be 500 or more, Mother Marie Anna agrees.

If 500 is the figure for 1970, Georgian Court must have new buildings—a science building, a new classroom building, some additional dormitory space. All these are projected, as the nucleus of a development plan.

CHANGES will be relatively minor in academic direction, the president makes clear. "We'll never get big," she says. "We'll build for quality, not quantity."

That's pleasant to hear, both from the standpoint of educational philosophy and from the standpoint of the splendor of the Gould estate. As the backdrop for a small women's liberal arts college the estate is perfect, far more perfect even than as the backdrop for the lavish Gould parties and spectacular entertaining. Bigness might tend to undervalue the high academic standards of Georgian Court—the college. Unquestionably it would destroy Georgian Court—the estate.